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SUBJECT: INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS' LEADER ATTACKED

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) On November 17 the Chairperson of the Investigative Journalists NGO and chief editor of Hetq online media outlet Edik Baghdasarian was attacked and severely beaten by three unknown individuals when exiting his office and approaching his car. According to Baghdasarian's reports to the media, the assailants were clearly waiting for him at his car. During the scuffle his camera fell to the ground and the assailants took it with them. One of the attackers hit Baghdasaryan's head with a stone, causing severe injury. Baghdasaryan is currently in the hospital; his injuries are not life-threatening. Police have launched a criminal case. Baghdassarian is a regular embassy contact, particularly on TIP issues. Post has been unable to contact Baghdassarian directly since the attack.

¶2. (SBU) Edik Baghdasarian and his online news agency have reported on a variety of politically charged cases, including human trafficking and corruption. His work has named names, some high-profile, in alleged official corruption cases in the mining and natural resources sectors. In September, for instance, Baghdasarian was awarded the Global Shining Light Award 2008 at the Global Investigative Journalism Conference in Norway for the series of articles he published on illegally provided mining licenses. The licenses were allegedly awarded by former Minister of Nature Protection Vardan Ayvazian to mining organizations owned by his relatives.

¶3. (SBU) The journalistic community is abuzz with hypotheses over the motives of what seems to have been a targeted ambush of Baghdasarian. While most tend to believe the attack was politically motivated -- though by whom exactly is unclear -- one savvy Public Affairs contact claimed to us the incident might more likely have been fall-out from a romantic liaison.

MYOVANOVITCH